

Howe Does Ellen G. White's "Patriarchs and Prophets" Contradict the Bible?

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Ellen G. White's "Patriarchs and Prophets" is a beloved and influential work within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition, providing a detailed commentary on the biblical narratives from Creation to the reign of King David. However, a careful examination of this text reveals instances where White's assertions depart significantly from the clear teachings of Scripture. As followers of Christ, we are called to approach all teachings, including those of respected leaders, with discernment, holding them up against the unchanging truth of God's inerrant Word. This article will explore several key areas where "Patriarchs and Prophets" appears to contradict the biblical record, considering the theological implications of such inconsistencies.

The Creation Account

In her description of the creation of the world, White adds numerous details not found in the Genesis account. For example, she writes that "*the earth came forth from the hand of the Creator exceedingly beautiful*" (PP, p. 44) and that "*myriads of angels were in attendance*" (PP, p. 35). However, the biblical creation narrative in [Genesis 1:2](#) does not mention these specifics. It simply states that "*God created the heavens and the earth*" ([Genesis 1:1](#)) without elaborating on the earth's appearance or the presence of angels. While White's additions may be theologically meaningful, they cannot be considered equal to the inspired text of Scripture.

The Temptation of Eve

White's retelling of Satan's temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden also includes details not found in Genesis 3. She describes Satan disguising himself as a serpent and engaging in an extended conversation with Eve (PP, pp. 53-55). The biblical account, on the other hand, states that "*the serpent said to the woman*" ([Genesis 3:1](#)) without specifying the nature of their dialogue. White also claims that Satan "*first endeavored to shake her confidence in God's wisdom and love*" (PP, p. 53), but the Genesis text does not mention this preliminary step. While White's interpretation may be plausible, it goes beyond what is explicitly stated in the biblical text.

The Nature of Sin

In her exploration of the origin of sin, White departs from the biblical narrative by tracing it back to Lucifer's rebellion in heaven. She writes that "*sin had its origin in self-seeking*" within Lucifer, the "*covering cherub*" (PP, pp. 35-36). However, the Bible does not provide details about the specific events leading to sin's entrance into the universe. [Genesis 3](#) simply states that "*the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field*" ([Genesis 3:1](#)) without explaining the serpent's own corruption. While White's account may offer a plausible explanation, it cannot be considered authoritative in the same way as the biblical text.

The Fate of the Wicked

White's teachings on the ultimate fate of the wicked also diverge from traditional Christian interpretations of Scripture. She advocates for the view of "*annihilation*," where the unrepentant will be destroyed rather than endure eternal conscious punishment (PP, pp. 267-268). This contradicts the clear biblical teaching of eternal judgment, as evidenced in passages like [Matthew 25:46](#): "*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*". Additionally, [Revelation 14:11](#) states that "*the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night*." While the nature of hell is debated, White's position cannot be considered fully consistent with the witness of Scripture.

The Investigative Judgment

Perhaps one of the most distinctive Adventist doctrines found in "Patriarchs and Prophets" is the concept of an "*investigative judgment*" preceding the second coming of Christ. White describes this as a process where "*the cases of the righteous and the wicked*" are examined in heaven (PP, p. 357). However, this specific teaching is not explicitly presented in the Bible, and its scriptural basis has been the subject of much theological discussion and debate within and outside the Adventist community. The implications of this doctrine, which includes the idea of a pre-Advent judgment, have significant ramifications for one's understanding of salvation and the second coming of Christ. The Bible, on the other hand, emphasizes the finality of Christ's work on the cross and the certainty of His return, without mention of an investigative judgment ([Hebrews 9:28](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#)).

Geopolitical Interpretations

White's application of biblical prophecies to specific geopolitical events and powers has been viewed by some as going beyond the original intent and scope of the scriptural texts. For example, her interpretation of [Daniel 7](#) and [Revelation 13](#) as referring to the rise and fall of particular historical empires (PP, pp. 384-408) has been challenged as going beyond the true meaning of the prophetic visions. While such interpretations may be theologically meaningful, they cannot be considered as authoritative as the biblical text itself. The biblical prophecies in Daniel and Revelation are primarily concerned with the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom, not the specific details of earthly empires ([Daniel 2:44](#); [Revelation 11:15](#)).

The Sabbath and the Law

Another area of potential contradiction is White's emphasis on the observance of the Sabbath and the perpetual validity of the Mosaic Law. She states that "*the Sabbath was hallowed at the creation*" (PP, p. 47) and that the Ten Commandments "*are unchangeable as the throne of God*" (PP, p. 365). However, the New Testament teachings of Paul and the early Church seem to indicate a shift in the understanding and application of the Mosaic Law, including the Sabbath commandment, in light of the finished work of Christ. Paul wrote, "*Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath*" ([Colossians 2:16](#)), and "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*" ([Romans 10:4](#)).

Conclusion

In conclusion, while "Patriarchs and Prophets" offers a rich and insightful exploration of the early biblical narrative, it is essential to recognize the instances where White's assertions depart significantly from the clear teachings of Scripture. As Christians, we must always hold any human interpretation, including our own, against the infallible standard of God's inerrant Word. By doing so, we can discern truth from error and grow in our understanding of the Scriptures, ultimately strengthening our faith in the revealed will of our Almighty Creator. The implications of these contradictions are significant, as they challenge the authority and reliability of "Patriarchs and Prophets" and, by extension, the unique doctrinal positions of the Seventh-day Adventist movement. While Adventists view White's writings as inspired, they must be weighed against the ultimate authority of the Bible. This calls for a careful and prayerful approach to reconciling any apparent conflicts, always seeking to uphold the inerrant Word of God as the foundation of our faith. Only by doing so can we ensure that our beliefs and practices are truly aligned with the truth revealed in Scripture.

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